



Is This Sexual Harassment?

Grades: 9-12
Time: 1-3 Class Periods
Subjects: All Subjects and Classes

Description:

This activity attempts to define sexual harassment through the use of resource materials and discussion of scenarios. Strategies to deal effectively with sexual harassment at the personal level will be developed as a class.

Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Define the term "sexual harassment."
- Understand sexual harassment.
- Recognize avenues of recourse in the event of being sexual harassed.
- Work equitable within a group.
- Apply knowledge of the subject to personal interactions.
- Recognize the value of arbitration in mediating incidents of sexual harassment.

Materials:

1. Chalkboard and/or overhead.
2. Scenarios (attached).

Note: Instructors should reference "Flirting or Hurting" by Nan Stein and Lisa Sjostrom for additional information and activities on this topic.

Procedure:

1. Instructor with students establish guidelines for student participation in this activity. Refer to "Tips for Teaching Equity Lesson Plans" in the Index of this publication.
2. Students define "sexual harassment." Students might look up the term in a dictionary, refer to support materials supplied by instructor (see Glossary in this publication), or listen to a guest speaker familiar with the legalities of the subject.
3. Students analyze scenarios to determine sexual harassment content.
 - Form groups of 2-4 students.
 - Give each group a copy of the enclosed scenarios, or make up your own.
 - Ask the groups to reach a consensus on whether a particular scenario depicts sexual harassment or not, as defined by the earlier class work.
 - Ask a spokesperson to present the group's findings to the class.
 - Discuss as a class.
4. Students are asked to come up with examples of situations that could be sexual harassment. Instructor leads class discussion to determine if the situations are sexual harassment.

5. Students and instructor discuss strategies for responding to incidents of sexual harassment. As noted earlier in discussions of “sexual harassment” definitions, the “harassed” has certain legal avenues of recourse. These options should be restated and emphasized. However, in real-life high school settings, students may be reluctant to pursue legal action. Discuss other ways to deal with a “harasser,” including letter writing, peer mediation, mediation with guidance staff, etc. Establish, if possible, a class-generated list of appropriate responses to be written down and prominently posted in the class, to be used as both a reference for victims and a deterrent for harassers. Emphasize that sexual harassment is not always clear cut and encourage students to report sexual harassment to a guidance counselor or teacher.

Evaluation:

Assess students’ work in groups: cooperation, energy, creativity, etc. Assess students’ ability to participate in a discussion: listening and speaking.

Sexual Harassment Scenarios

1. Bill is a student at Tech. He is in the cosmetology shop, sophomore year. For several weeks, Bill has been subjected to name calling by several male students. These incidents occur, for the most part, in the corridors during passing time, and in the cafeteria. The names these students use are “faggot” and “homo,” accompanied with obscene suggestions meant as a put down.
 - Is this sexual harassment?
 - What should Bill do?
 - How can this situation be resolved?

2. Ellen is a junior at Tech. Recently, a senior named Doug has been paying a lot of attention to Ellen. He tells her that she’s “hot,” that he’d like to get together with her, that he knows how to make her happy. Ellen is flattered by the attention, but she really doesn’t like Doug that much. She has asked him to stop bothering her at school and to stop calling her at home. He won’t take “no” for an answer and persists in pursuing Ellen, hoping she will give in.
 - Is this sexual harassment?
 - What should Ellen do?
 - How can this situation be resolved?

3. Sue and Mary are friends. They are ninth graders at Tech. Lately, Sue has been teasing Mary about a boy they both know. Sue claims that this boy, Eddie, really “likes” Mary and wants to get together with her. Sue constantly refers to Eddie’s physique in crude sexual terms and makes references to his alleged romantic history. Mary is very uncomfortable with this teasing and has asked Sue to stop. Sue thinks it’s funny and has no intention of stopping. Besides, she thinks Eddie and Mary would make a good couple.
 - Is this sexual harassment?
 - What should Mary do?
 - How can this situation be resolved?

Writing a Sexual Harassment Letter

If a student comes to you and complains about being sexually harassed by another student, you can handle it quickly and effectively by immediately (or as soon as possible) helping the student write a letter to the “harasser”. Here’s what the letter should include:

Date

To: (name of “harasser”)

- A description of exactly what happened, when it happened or how often it happened, where it happened
- How this made the victim feel (angry, embarrassed, helpless, comfortable, etc.)
- A request that this behavior stop and a promise that, if it stops, nothing further will be done about it. If it doesn't stop, the behavior will be considered sexual harassment and subject to disciplinary action.

Full name and signature of student writing the letter

cc (name of staff member helping the student write the letter)

The staff member keeps a copy of the letter, gives a copy to the student who wrote the letter and then personally delivers or asks a guidance counselor to deliver the letter to the “harasser”, making it clear that this is a very serious matter, but that if the behavior described in the letter stops and the letter writer is left alone, absolutely no other action will be taken and the matter will be closed. If the person receiving the letter complains that the letter writer did objectionable things to him/her, it's important to explain that he/she also has the right to write a letter.

Note: A sexual harassment letter is not a disciplinary action, and it is not kept on file by the Dean's office. It is a communication document between two students with the sole purpose of stopping behavior which is causing distress to one of the students. However, if the sexual harassment described by the student involved extreme physical assault, a letter response would not be appropriate, and the matter should be turned over to the Dean immediately for more direct attention.

Source: Beverly Lydiard at Minuteman Vocational Technical High School, Lexington, Massachusetts.

Source: *Gender Equity Lesson Plans and Teacher Guide for High Schools*, ©1999. “Springfield Technical Community College reserves all rights to materials produced through the Western Massachusetts Gender Equity Center. These materials are not for sale or resale.”